

## 2005 IATE Poetry and Prose Contest

### Poems of Exceptional Merit

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#### *Coming-of-Age*

(after Billy Collins)

I watch the other kids study for standardized  
tests that are the new rites of passage  
now that Native American vision quests  
and naming ceremonies have fallen out of style,

along with Roman sacrifices to Lares and Penates,  
the minor gods of the household  
and of adulthood. These tests are all we have left,  
and we refer to them by odd nicknames,

terms of endearment, ACT, GED, MCAT.  
They are the ones who in high school  
were trendy, if not quite cool,  
proving their worth by prettying on susceptible

teen-agers, weaklings intimidated into spending  
their lunch money on review books  
that cram the history of everything  
into two hundred pages, so Henry VIII

accidentally sits on  $\chi$  when cosine has a double  
argument, and Carnegie ends up  
next to *lascivious*, who seems pretentious,  
like old money. The science reasoning graphs

keep bumping noses with  
the analogies, which are impossible to live with.  
There is a quiet girl skipping lunch again  
to study in the back of her classroom

with the book on her lap,  
dropping crumbs onto its pages.  
If she were to pick an Indian name  
for her coming-of-age, it would be Sixteen Hundred.